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(54) **SUPPORTING ASSEMBLY WITH A ROLLING BALL DISPOSED DIRECTLY BELOW SUPPORTING RODS AND METHOD FOR USING THE SAME**

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F16L 3/12; G03F 7/2041
USPC 248/65, 68.1, 73, 74.4, 49, 74.2
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H01L 21/308 (2006.01)
F16L 3/01 (2006.01)
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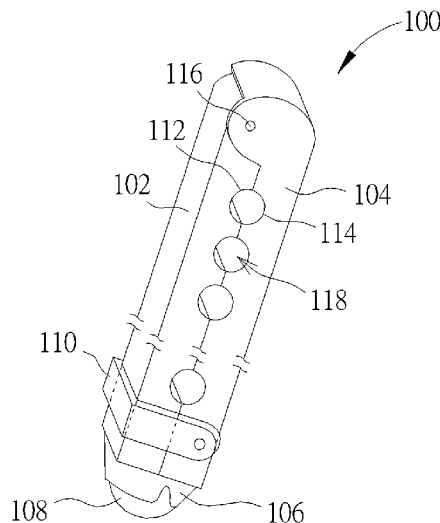
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(57)

ABSTRACT

A supporting assembly configured to support a plurality of tubes includes a first supporting rod, a second supporting rod opposite to the first supporting rod, a bridging member, and a rolling member. The first supporting rod includes several first parallel recesses. The bridging member is connected to one end of the first supporting rod or one end of the second supporting rod. The rolling member is received by the bridging member.

17 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



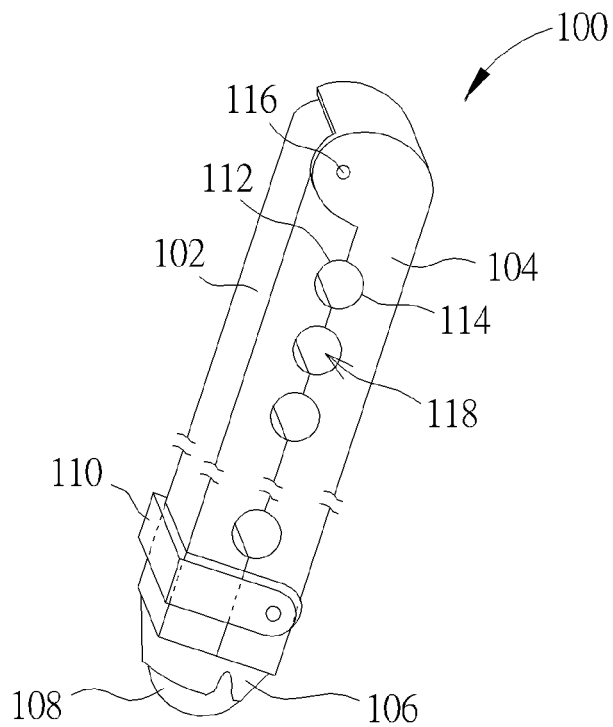


FIG. 1

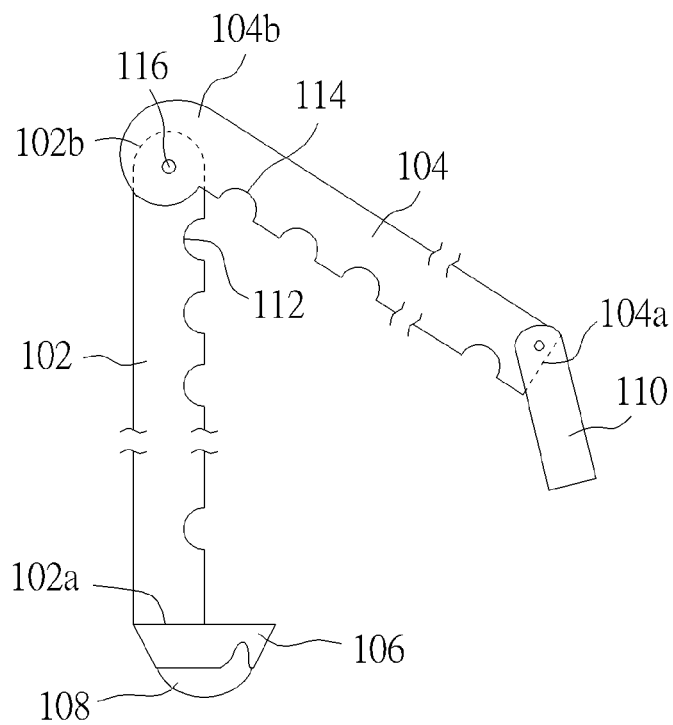


FIG. 2

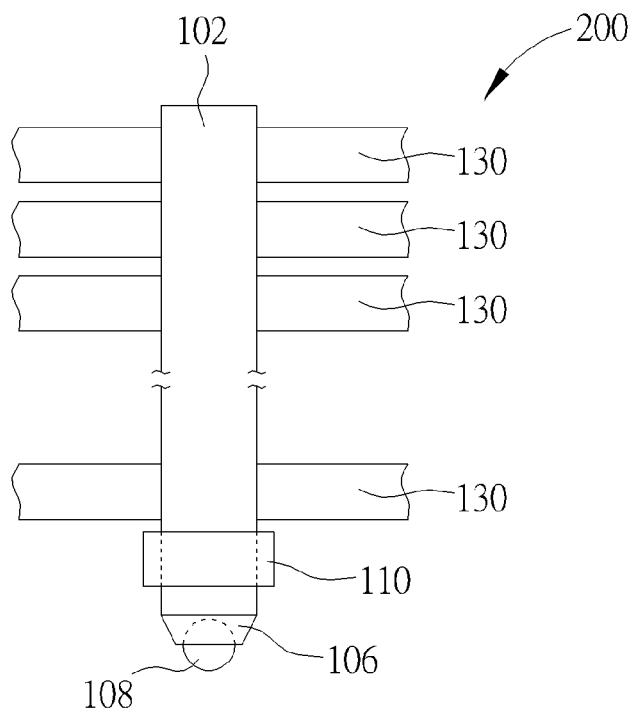


FIG. 3

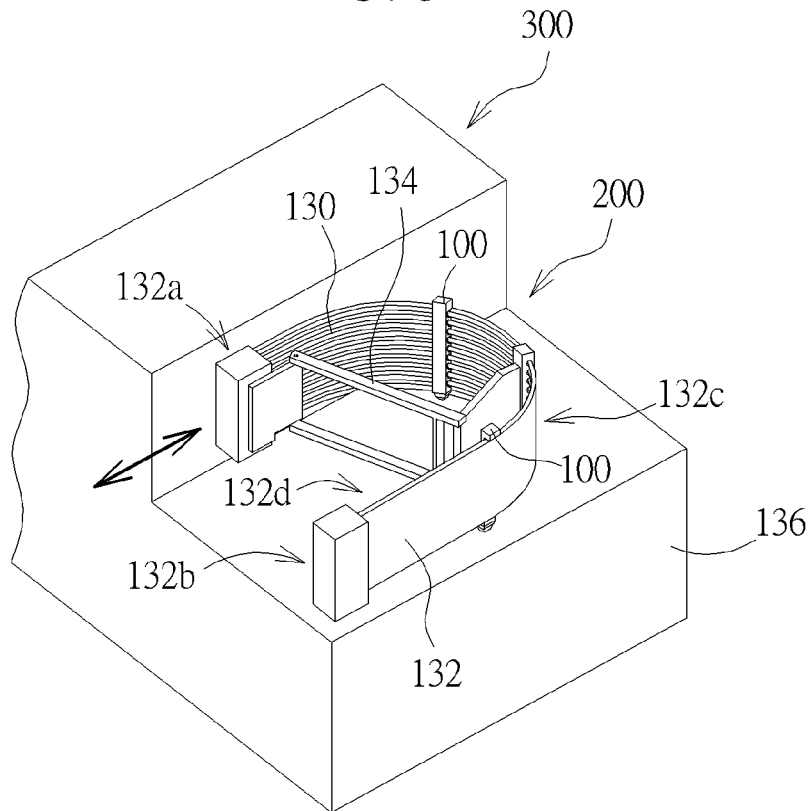


FIG. 4

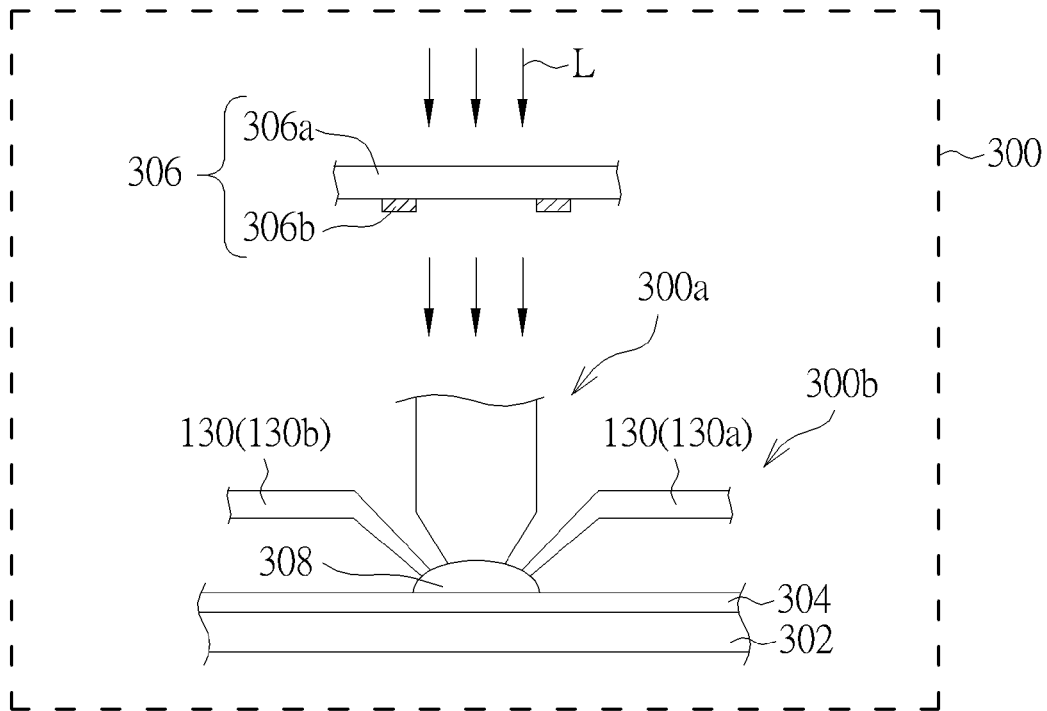


FIG. 5

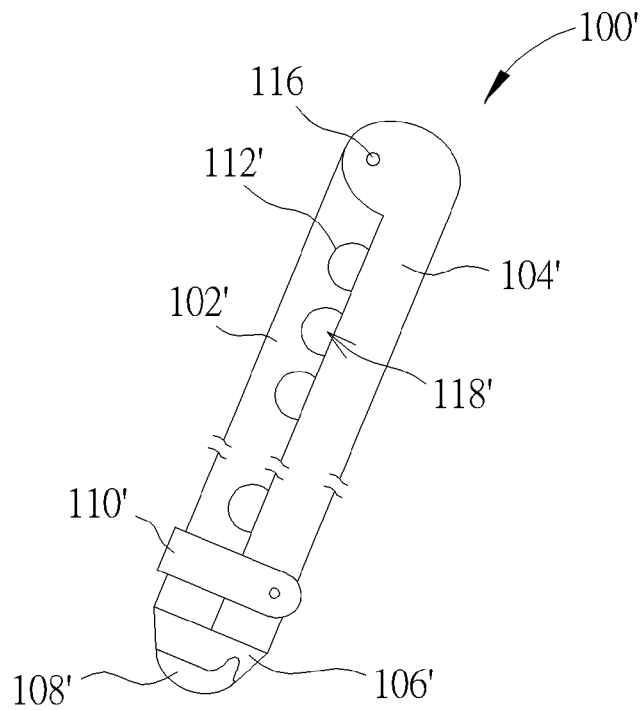


FIG. 6

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SUPPORTING ASSEMBLY WITH A ROLLING BALL DISPOSED DIRECTLY BELOW SUPPORTING RODS AND METHOD FOR USING THE SAME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to the field of a supporting apparatus, and more particularly to a supporting assembly configured to support flexible tubes.

2. Description of the Prior Art

With the increasing miniaturization of semiconductor devices, a variety of projection exposure apparatuses used to transfer patterns from a reticle to a substrate have been invented. Currently, in order to improve both the resolutions and the depth of the focus (DOF), immersion exposure apparatuses have been developed and are widely adopted by the semiconductor manufactures.

Briefly, the basic working principle of the immersion exposure apparatus is that the space between an objective lens and a photosensitive layer can be filled with high-index liquid during an exposure process. By the use of high-index liquid, the light passing through the objective lens may be further concentrated before it reaches the surface of the photosensitive layer. In this way, the dimensions of patterns formed in the photosensitive layer may be decreased effectively without reducing the depth of the focus.

Furthermore, in order to apply high-index liquid to the space between the objective lens and the photosensitive layer, a liquid supply apparatus including several flexible tubes is often equipped in the immersion exposure apparatus. The flexible tubes are often in direct contact with an underlying platform and are used to transport liquid from containers to the immersion exposure apparatus. During the operation of the immersion exposure apparatus, the flexible tubes often move back and forth on the platform. The flexible tubes, however, often need to be replaced since they inevitably wear out during the movement. This replacement causes unnecessary expenses and is often time consuming. Therefore, there is a need to solve these problems.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One object of embodiments of the present invention is to provide a supporting assembly and a method for using it so as to overcome the above mentioned problems.

According to one embodiment of the present invention, a supporting assembly configured to support a plurality of tubes is provided and includes a first supporting rod, a second supporting rod opposite to the first supporting rod, a bridging member, and a rolling member. The first supporting rod includes several parallel recesses. The bridging member is connected to one end of the first supporting rod or one end of the second supporting rod. The rolling member is received by the bridging member.

One main characteristic of the embodiment is that the tubes are able to be received by the parallel recesses and therefore to be supported by the supporting assembly. In this way, friction between the tubes and an underlying platform can be avoided. As a result, the tubes may be moved above the underlying platform without wearing out and the lifetime of the tubes may be improved.

These and other objectives of the present invention will no doubt become obvious to those of ordinary skill in the art after

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reading the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment that is illustrated in the various figures and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic perspective diagram showing a supporting assembly according to one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a schematic side view of FIG. 1 showing a supporting assembly according to one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a schematic side view showing a supporting assembly with several tubes according to one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a schematic perspective diagram showing a support mechanism connected to a fabrication apparatus according to one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram showing an exposure apparatus according to one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a schematic side-view showing a supporting assembly according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following description, numerous specific details are given to provide a thorough understanding of the invention. It will, however, be apparent to one skilled in the art that the invention may be practiced without these specific details. Furthermore, some well-known system configurations and process steps are not disclosed in detail, as these should be well-known to those skilled in the art.

Likewise, the drawings showing embodiments of the apparatus are not to scale and some dimensions are exaggerated for clarity of presentation. Also, where multiple embodiments are disclosed and described as having some features in common, like or similar features will usually be described with same reference numerals for ease of illustration and description thereof.

Please refer to FIG. 1 and FIG. 2. FIG. 1 is a schematic perspective diagram showing a supporting assembly according to a first embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 2 is schematic side view of FIG. 1 showing a structure of a supporting assembly according to a first embodiment of the present invention. Referring to FIG. 1 and FIG. 2, a supporting assembly 100 is provided. The supporting assembly 100 includes at least a first supporting rod 102, a second supporting rod 104 disposed opposite to the first supporting rod 102, a bridging member 106, a rolling member 108, and an optional fastening member 110. The bridging member 106 is connected to a lower end 102a of the first supporting rod 102 and is used to receive the rolling member 108, such as a rolling ball. Preferably, the first supporting rod 102 is pivotally connected to the second supporting rod 104 by a pivot point 116. For example, an upper end 102b of the first supporting rod 102 is pivotally connected to an upper end 104b of the second supporting rod 104. In this way, a lower end 104a of the second supporting rod 104 is able to move along an arc path to approach or separate from the lower end 102a of the first supporting rod 102. Besides, the optional fastening member 110 may be used to fasten the first supporting rod 102 to the second supporting rod 104. In detail, the optional fastening member 110 is pivotally connected to the lower end 104a of the second supporting rod 104. When the fastening member 110 is at a locked position, the first supporting rod 102

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may be tightly fastened to the second supporting rod **104**. Preferably, the type of the fastening member **110** according to the present embodiment is a rotatable shell. However, there may also be another suitable type of fastening member, such as a bolt, a lock, a screw, or a clasp, but not limited thereto. Furthermore, the first supporting rod **102** and the second supporting rod **104** may respectively include first parallel recesses **112** and second parallel recesses **114** having arc or semicircular contours. As shown in FIG. 1, the first parallel recesses **112** are oppositely disposed to the second parallel recess **114** and a pair of the first parallel recess **112** and the second parallel recess **114** may constitute a through hole **118** with a cylindrical contour. Preferably, each of the through holes **118** is designed to receive a flexible tube and this characteristic is described in the following paragraphs.

The structure of the supporting assembly **100** is briefly disclosed in the preceding paragraph. According to the first embodiment of the present invention, one purpose of the supporting assembly is to support tubes used in semiconductor fabrication apparatuses. For example, the supporting assembly may be configured to support flexible tubes used in an exposure apparatus. For the sake of clarity, the function and the working principle of the supporting assembly is disclosed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Please refer to FIG. 3. FIG. 3 is a schematic side view showing a supporting assembly with several tubes according to one embodiment of the present invention. Referring to FIG. 3, the first supporting rod **102** is fastened to the second supporting rod **104** by moving the fastening member **110** to the locked position. At this time, several tubes **130** are able to be tightly received by the through holes **118** of the supporting assembly **100**. Precisely, in order to transport fluids, two ends of each of the tubes **130** may be respectively connected to a tank filled with fluids and a fabrication apparatus. In this way, fluids, such as gas or liquid, may be transported from the tank to an interior of the fabrication apparatus. Since the tubes **130** may move back and forth during the operation of the fabrication apparatus, they are preferably made of flexible materials, such as rubber or plastic.

Please refer to FIG. 4. FIG. 4 is a schematic perspective diagram showing a support mechanism according to a first embodiment of the present invention. Referring to FIG. 4, the tubes **130** may extend outwardly from one side of a fabrication apparatus **300** and supported by a support mechanism **200**. Precisely, the support mechanism **200** is disposed on a platform **132** and includes at least the supporting assembly **100**, a flexible plate **132**, and an optional supporting linkage **134**. For example, the flexible plate **132** has a movable end **132a**, a static end **132b**, a curved portion **132c**, and a straight portion **132d**. During the operation of the exposure apparatus **300**, the movable end **132a** may move linearly and reciprocate in opposite directions, while the static end **132b** is fixed. The curved portion **132c** of the flexible plate **132** may be moved correspondingly due to the movement of the movable end **132a**. Besides, in order to reinforce the strength of the flexible plate **132**, especially the strength of the curved portion **132c**, the supporting linkage **134** may link the curved portion **132c** to the movable end **132a**, but not limited thereto. It should be noted that the tubes **130** are disposed side-by-side on an inner surface of the flexible plate **132** and portions of each of the tubes **130** are received by the through hole **118** of the supporting assembly **100**. One main characteristic of the first embodiment of the present invention is that the supporting assembly **100** can support the tubes **130** and move on the surface of the platform **132**. In detail, since the rolling element **108** directly contacts the platform **132** during the movement of the curved portion **132c**, the tubes **130** and/or flexible

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plate **132** may be spaced apart from the platform **132** by the supporting assembly **100**. In this way, there is no friction between the tubes **130** and the platform **132** and the support mechanism **200** may move on the platform **132** smoothly. Preferably, the supporting assembly **100** is mainly disposed near the curved portion **132c** of the flexible plate **132** and may be attached to or spaced apart from the inner surface of the flexible plate **132**. Besides, the total number of the supporting assembly **100** may be more than one, if required, but not limited thereto.

Furthermore, the fabrication apparatus **300** disclosed in the preceding paragraph may be an exposure apparatus, preferably an immersion exposure apparatus used for fabricating a pattern on a semiconductor substrate. Please refer to FIG. 5. FIG. 5 is a schematic cross-sectional diagram showing an exposure apparatus according to one embodiment of the present invention. Referring to FIG. 4 and FIG. 5, the fabrication apparatus **300** shown in FIG. 5 includes at least a projection optical apparatus **300a** and a liquid supply apparatus **300b**. In detail, the liquid supply apparatus **300b** includes two types of tubes, i.e. supply tubes **130a** and recovery tubes **130b**, which may extend out of the fabrication apparatus **300** to become the tubes **130** shown in FIG. 4. During the process for fabricating a pattern on a semiconductor substrate, a semiconductor substrate **302** and a photomask **306** including a transparent substrate **306a** and a pattern **306b** may be first transmitted to the fabrication apparatus **300**. For example, the semiconductor substrate **302** having a photosensitive layer **304** thereon is first transmitted from another fabrication apparatus, such as a deposition apparatus, into the fabrication apparatus **300**. Then, liquids, such as de-ion (DI) water or high-index fluids, are injected from the supply tubes **130a** so as to form a drop of liquid **308** or liquid confined by walls on the surface of the photosensitive layer **304**. Afterwards, light **L** generated from a light source may pass through the photomask **306** and be concentrated by the projection optical apparatus **300a**. It should be noted that, because a drop of liquid **308** is disposed on the surface of the photosensitive layer **304**, light **L** may be further concentrated by the liquid before it reaches the photosensitive layer **304**. Then, the liquid **308** may be further removed by the recovery tubes **130b** so as to complete a cycle of the exposure process. In a next step, another cycle of the exposure process may be carried out in order to transfer the pattern from the photomask to another region of the photosensitive layer. It should be noted that since the supply tube **130a** and the recovery tube **130b** may move over the surface of the semiconductor substrate **302** during the whole exposure process, the tubes **130** extending from the fabrication apparatus **300** may be moved correspondingly. One main characteristic of the present embodiment is that the supporting assembly **100** installed in the support mechanism **200** is able to support the tubes **130** during the whole exposure process. As a result, the tubes **130** are spaced apart from the platform **132** and therefore there is no friction between the tubes **130** and the platform **132**.

In the following paragraph, a modification of the first embodiment is disclosed and the description below is mainly focused on differences between these two embodiments. In addition, like or similar features will usually be described with same reference numerals for ease of illustration and description thereof.

Please refer to FIG. 6. FIG. 6 is a schematic side-view showing a supporting assembly according to one embodiment of the present invention. Similarly, the supporting assembly **100'** shown in FIG. 6 also includes at least the first supporting rod **102'**, the second supporting rod **104'** disposed opposite to the first supporting rod **102'**, the bridging member

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106', the rolling member 108, and the optional fastening member 110'. However, one main difference between this modification and the first embodiment is that only the first supporting rod 102' has parallel recesses 112' according to this modification while there are no recesses in the second supporting rod 104'. In detail, the parallel recesses 112' are distributed along one side of the first supporting rod 102'. When the first supporting rod 102' and the second supporting rod 104' are set at a locked position, several through holes 118' defined by the parallel recesses 112' and the edge of the second supporting rod 104' are obtained. Similarly, these through holes 118' may be used to receive flexible tubes extending from a fabrication apparatus. The shape of each of the through holes 118' may be semicircle, U-shaped or arc-shaped, but not limited thereto. Apart from the position of the recesses, the rest of the parts of the supporting assembly 100' disclosed in this embodiment, such as positions of other parts, are almost similar to those shown in the supporting assembly 100 according to the previous first embodiment. Besides, operation principles of these two embodiments are also the same. For the sake of brevity, these similar configurations and operation principles are therefore not disclosed in detail.

In summary, the supporting assembly is provided according to the embodiments of the present invention. One main characteristic of these embodiments is that the tubes extending from the fabrication apparatus are able to be received by the parallel through holes and therefore to be supported by the supporting assembly. In this way, there is no friction between the tubes and the underlying platform. As a result, the tubes may be moved above the underlying platform without wearing out and the lifetime of the tubes may be improved.

Those skilled in the art will readily observe that numerous modifications and alterations of the device and method may be made while retaining the teachings of the invention. Accordingly, the above disclosure should be construed as limited only by the metes and bounds of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A supporting assembly configured to support a plurality of tubes capable of transporting fluids, comprising:

- a first supporting rod comprising a plurality of first parallel recesses;
- a second supporting rod disposed opposite to the first supporting rod; wherein the second supporting rod comprises a plurality of second parallel recesses;
- a bridging member connected to one end of the first supporting rod or one end of the second supporting rod; and
- a rolling ball disposed directly below a longitudinal axis of the first and second supporting rods and received by the bridging member, the rolling ball capable of moving the supporting assembly.

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2. The structure according to claim 1, further comprising a fastening member fixed on the first or the second supporting rods.

3. The structure according to claim 2, wherein the first supporting rod is fastened to the second supporting rod by the fastening member.

4. The structure according to claim 1, wherein the first parallel recesses are configured to receive the tubes.

5. The structure according to claim 1, wherein the first supporting rod is pivotally connected to the second supporting rod.

6. The structure according to claim 1, wherein each of the first parallel recesses has an arc contour.

7. The structure according to claim 1, wherein each of the second parallel recesses has an arc contour.

8. The structure according to claim 1, wherein the second parallel recesses are configured to receive the tubes.

9. The structure according to claim 1, wherein the first parallel recesses and the second parallel recesses constitute a plurality of parallel through holes.

10. The structure according to claim 9, wherein each of the parallel through holes has a cylindrical contour.

11. A method for using the structure according to claim 1, wherein the tubes are disposed above a platform and respectively connected to an apparatus, the method comprising:

- disposing the tubes in the first parallel recesses of the first supporting rod; and
- moving the rolling element on the platform.

12. The method according to claim 11, further comprising a fastening member fixed on the first or the second supporting rods.

13. The method according to claim 12, wherein the first supporting rod is fastened to the second supporting rod by the fastening member.

14. The method according to claim 11, wherein the first supporting rod is pivotally connected to the second supporting rod.

15. The method according to claim 11, wherein the first parallel recesses and the second parallel recesses constitute a plurality of parallel through holes.

16. The method according to claim 11, further comprising moving the rolling ball on the platform in a reciprocating way.

17. A support mechanism, comprising:
a flexible plate; and
the supporting assembly of claim 1 attached to the flexible plate.

* * * * *